

Bald eagles have increased in Washington State from about 105 nesting pairs in 1980 to well over 1,500 today. In Washington, a small portion of bald eagle nests are in parks and other protected public lands, but two-thirds of the nests are located on private lands. Private landowners who have cooperated in protecting nesting birds and their habitat deserve our thanks in helping bald eagles recover to their present numbers.

When adopted as the nation's symbol in 1782, bald eagles inhabited every large river and major concentration of lakes in North America. By the late 1800s, the bald eagle's population and range had been reduced to the point that most of the remaining birds were restricted to Alaska, Canada, the Great Lakes states, Florida, and the Pacific Northwest.

Today, after decades of federal protection, as well as public and private recovery efforts, bald eagle populations have increased 20-fold since the early 1960's and they continue to rise. By 2007 bald eagle numbers had recovered enough to be removed from both the threatened and endangered species list and current population estimates show nearly 200,000 birds present in the lower 48 states.



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Bald Eagles Along the Pend Oreille River



As part of its continuing stewardship and commitment toward preserving the health and beauty of the river, the Pend Oreille Public Utility District (PUD) participates in many environmental efforts, including monitoring and protection of bald eagles and their habitat.

The PUD conducts annual surveys of eagle populations at various times throughout the year to study nesting behavior, nest productivity, and winter use.

As part of the PUD's license to operate Box Canyon Dam the utility has undertaken additional work to enhance and protect bald eagle habitat along the reservoir. This work includes planting over 50 acres of Black Cottonwood and Ponderosa Pine trees (the most successful nest trees in the area) on publicly owned properties near the river. The PUD also started a cottonwood fund administered through the Pend Oreille Conservation District to encourage and support private landowners to do the same (see the PUD's website for more details).

Bald eagles are monogamous and mate for life. A bald eagle will only select another mate if its faithful companion should die. Bald eagles build nests primarily along marine shorelines and major rivers of western and northeastern Washington. Nests are usually built in large trees.

Large trees along shorelines are important perch sites for foraging, roosting, and nesting. At night, eagles often perch together in communal roosts. Roost sites are selected that provide a favorable microclimate, such as protection from prevailing winds.

Eagles are sensitive to disturbances while nesting; and by boaters while foraging. Eagles often avoid foraging in water around stationary boats.

Washington nesters usually return to their territories by late January. Eagles are most sensitive to disturbance February through April. They are establishing territories and beginning incubation at this time. Once the chicks have hatched, the adults are less likely to abandon them as a result of disturbance. After mid-July, the chicks are typically able to fly and are then less vulnerable. The least sensitive period for eagles is July through January.



What do landowners need to know?

- Keep observations brief, then move on
- Move quietly, slowly, and in plain view
- Respect the environment, disturbing as little as possible
- Learn appropriate distances

Work activities should not take place within 330' of active nests/roosts that are out of line of sight, or within 660' from nests/roosts that are in the line of sight, from February through June, unless surveys demonstrate that the nest or roost is not being used.

For citizens who own property where bald eagle nests are located that have a strong interest in providing maximum protection to bald eagle nest sites, an additional process is available. It is called the Bald Eagle Management Plan.

A Bald Eagle Management Plan is a habitat protection agreement between the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the landowner to help ensure minimal impact on bald eagles and reasonable land use for the owner. Large projects located near bald eagle nests, such as logging or home construction, may necessitate a Bald Eagle Management Plan. For further information contact WDFW (see back).